

**CITY OF SAINT PAUL
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

FILE NAME: 470 Selby Avenue
DATE OF APPLICATION: September 19, 2013
APPLICANT: DeMars Signs
OWNER: Saint Paul Curling Club
DATE OF PUBLIC HEARING: November 7, 2013
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Hill Historic District
CATEGORY: Contributing
CLASSIFICATION: Sign Permit
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Spong
DATE: October 30, 2013

A. SITE DESCRIPTION: The Saint Paul Curling Club at 470 Selby Avenue was designed by architect Clarence H. Johnston, Jr. and built in 1912 by N.P. Fransen & Company. It is a two-story stuccoed building with Tudor detailing, with a one-story wing to the west and rear. The building has a brick foundation, multi-paned casement windows and a hipped roof joined with gables. The St. Paul Curling Club has been in existence at this site since 1912. The Club formed in 1912 from the merger of the Nushka Club which played in an earlier building on this site and the Capital City Curling Club. The Club originally used natural ice, but began to install artificial ice in 1941. The building was remodeled in 1982 and remains in its original use. The building also has a unique and prominent street presence on this stretch of Selby Avenue. There are two main entrances, one facing Selby which currently has two signs—one on an historic flag pole and the second is recessed within the arch above the entry.

B. PROPOSED CHANGES: The applicant is proposing to install a projecting double-sided blade sign above the entry on Selby Avenue. The red metal sign with white vinyl lettering will read “The Curling Club” and the word “Curling” will have red neon at the individual letters. The sign is 21.5” tall by 42” wide and will project 62” starting within the recess of the doorway. This sign is new but a likeness to one that was present in the 1940’s and removed at an unknown time. Two through bolts with 2” square brackets are proposed to be attached within the arched doorway.

C. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

Hill Historic District Guidelines

- 1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.*
- 2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*
- 3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.*
- 4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.*
- 5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.*
- 6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.*

Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

7. *Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.*
8. *Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.*
9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*
10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

Section 74.65 New Construction.

- (i) *Signs: Generally, signs should be compatible with the character of the district and blend with the character of the structures on or near which they are placed. Signs should not conceal architectural detail, clutter the building's image, or distract from the unity of the facade, but rather should complement the overall design. Sign materials should complement the materials of the related building and/or adjacent buildings. Surface design elements should not detract from or conflict with the related structure's age and design. No facade should be damaged in the application of signs, except for mere attachment.*

D. FINDINGS:

1. On April 2, 1991, the Hill Heritage Preservation District was established under Ordinance No. 17815, § 3(II). The Heritage Preservation Commission shall protect the architectural character of heritage preservation sites through review and approval or denial of applications for city permits for exterior work within designated heritage preservation sites §73.04.(4).
2. The property is categorized as contributing to the character of both the local and National Register Hill Historic Districts. The Period of Significance for the Hill District is 1858 to 1930. While the Curling Club is not individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a draft nomination form was completed as a student project under criterion A for history (organization and recreation) and the Period of Significance suggested was 1912 to 1962 when the organization saw a drop in membership, albeit somewhat short-lived.
3. The owner is proposing a new sign that is fashioned after a former sign as shown in a black and white photograph from 1962. The photo shows the style, shape, location and method of attachment. The photo also shows exposed white tubes of neon only on the word "Curling." The photo does not indicate exact size or color except white and the background being a dark color. There are no earlier photos available to determine when this sign was first installed and when it was removed. However, neon reached a height of popularity in the 1940s and the sign's streamlined styling would likely predate the 1960s.
4. If the sign guidelines were applied as if reviewing a new sign, then the sign would not meet the guidelines because the sign is not *compatible with the character of the district* nor does it *blend with the character of the structures on or near which they are placed*. The character of the district stems from its late 19th and early 20th century architecture and the 1912 clubhouse is in a Tudor Revival style. Neon first appeared in the 1920s. The sign would also not comply with the guidelines that states "*Surface design elements should not detract from or conflict with the related structure's age and design.*"
5. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (SOI Standards) for storefronts

recommend *"Identifying, retaining, and preserving storefronts—and their functional and decorative features—that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building such as...signs...."* Rehabilitation is one of four treatment standards that recognize a building changes over time and certain changes may acquire significance in their own right. The historic sign while not present during the Hill District's Period of Significance, was present at a time when the Curling Club experienced a period of growth and expansion and the building exists in its same use today. The proposed sign represents an era for the Club that is part of a suggested Period of Significance as part of a draft National Register nomination.

6. The SOI Standards recommend, in the case of limited replacement of missing historic features that *"It may be an accurate restoration using historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the size, scale, material, and color of the historic building."* The new design differs in some of the materials such as vinyl letters/graphics and the use of red neon tube glass. The attachment method also differs in that the new sign will project from a two-inch square tube attached to a plate with two through-bolts, while the historic sign hung from a pole with guy-wire supports. There is also no space between the stucco façade and the sign which the historic sign had. (The Lowertown sign guidelines require space between a building façade and a projecting sign and they also supersede zoning standards to allow for the use of guy-wires for support).
7. Around this main arched entry there is an original flagpole to the side and a relief sculpture/emblem above the arch. Adding a new projecting sign just below the decorative emblem may somewhat *conceal architectural detail, clutter the building's image, or distract from the unity of the facade* which is not recommended in the guidelines.
8. Based on the findings, the proposal to install the sign will not adversely affect the Program for the Preservation and architectural control of the Hill Heritage Historic District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)) so long as the conditions are met.

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings staff recommends approval of the sign permit application provided the following conditions are met:

1. To be more consistent with the original neon sign, the attachment to the building shall be with a round pole at the top of the sign (of an appropriate style) and any needed side or base supports and there shall be a space between the sign and the outer edge of the façade similar to that shown in the 1962 photo.
2. The neon glass tube shall be white which is consistent with the original sign. There shall be no blinking or flashing of the light. The application also did not address how the electricity would be supplied and that information shall be submitted to staff for final review.
3. If the current flag sign is removed the flag pole shall remain.
4. There shall be no damage to the decorative emblem and flagpole during installation
4. The plans shall be revised and submitted to staff for final review prior to a sign permit being issued.
5. Any revisions by the owner or sign contractor shall be forwarded to staff for review and any direction for next steps.

D. ATTACHMENTS

1. HPC Design Review Application
2. Photos
3. Drawings
4. #25 Preservation Briefs: *The Preservation of Historic Signs*